Commonly-Asked Questions

(C) Questions Regarding Submitted Applications

Have all my application materials been received?
Why haven't I heard yet whether I've been admitted?
Why haven't I heard yet regarding financial aid?
I applied to the Ph.D. program but was admitted to the MS program. Why?
I was admitted, but didn't get funding --- what are my options?
I was told I would be considered for financial aid. What are my chances?
I've got a financial aid offer from another school. How soon will Stanford let me know about financial aid?

Answers

Have all my application materials been received?

Please wait until mid-February to ask about the status of your application, no matter what program in our department you are applying to! We have a single departmental staff member who, in addition to her regular responsibilities, is in charge of logging in and sorting out the more than 500 graduate applications that are received by our department in mid-December. It takes her most of January just to assemble the individual application folders and assess whether each one is complete. The department will send you an email sometime in January acknowledging receipt of your application. If anything is still missing from your application in early February, we will send you a second email telling you what is missing.

Why haven't I heard yet whether I've been admitted?

Since our department receives over 500 applications (for all our programs combined), an entire month or more is required for the department staff to sort out the materials into separate folders for each applicant, and log their information onto the Stanford computer system. When folders are considered "complete", they are then given to the faculty admissions committee in the appropriate program for review. We do not use some kind of mathematical formula to arrive at an admissions decision; instead, we literally read the entire contents of each folder to assess the overall strengths/weaknesses of each
applicant. As you might suspect, this also takes quite a bit of time; the EES program typically spends more than 6 weeks reviewing the applications we receive. This is why the decision letters for our admissions get mailed out continuously from mid-February through late March.

We realize that environmental graduate programs at some other US schools mail out admission decisions more quickly than we do. However, it is important to us to evaluate thoroughly each set of application materials, and to carefully consider each admission decision, so we are not willing to institute shortcuts that might speed up our application review process.

**Why haven't I heard yet regarding financial aid?**

Decision letters on admission are typically mailed out between late February and mid-March; these letters will indicate whether or not your application will be considered for financial aid.

Each program must wait to hear from the Department and from Stanford's School of Engineering before knowing how much funding will be available for financial aid in a given year. There are also two types of School of Engineering-level fellowship awards where we must first "nominate" candidates, and then wait to hear whether our nominees have been selected for funding. Thus, while you will be notified of the decision regarding admission sometime between late February and mid-March, we usually are not able to make financial aid offers until late March.

Since Stanford does not waive tuition, we usually offer "full" fellowships, in which tuition is fully paid for, and a monthly stipend is provided which is considered enough to fully support the student. In recent years, the EES program has been able to offer 4-6 students full financial aid packages at the MS level, with funding recipients selected based on who appears strongest to us academically (without consideration of financial need or citizenship).

*I applied to the Ph.D. program but was admitted to the MS program. Why?*

We admitted you initially to the MS program because you do not have an MS degree. Stanford School of Engineering requires grad students to fulfill course requirements equivalent to an MS even if they are interested "just" in the Ph.D. These MS course requirements can
typically be completed within a 9 month period (3 quarters of study).

Students admitted to our MS program who are interested in continuing on for a Ph.D. fill out a simple form in January of the MS year, indicating whether they want to pursue an Engineer's or Ph.D. degree, and which faculty member(s) they would like to work with. Then the application materials used for the MS admission (like transcripts, recommendation letters) are reused. Whereas we do admit MS-level students without financial aid, we only admit post-MS students if full funding (tuition and stipend) is available to support them. Also, whereas MS applicant folders are reviewed by an admission committee for the program (based on mutually-agreed-upon criteria), Ph.D. folders are reviewed just by the individual faculty member(s) whose research group the student is interested in joining. To get admitted for Ph.D. studies, the faculty member has to (i) judge you as a good prospect for doing PhD-level research in his/her group; and (ii) have adequate funding available to fully support you [unless you have an outside fellowship].

_I was admitted, but didn't get funding --- what are my options?_

We get many very strong students applying to our program, and it is disappointing to us that we can't offer more of them financial support for their MS studies, because we realize that it is costly to attend Stanford. Stanford does not permit any sort of tuition waiver.

If you are US citizen, you were sent information on loans available through Stanford. The other possible option, if you qualify based on financial need (as judged by recent tax returns and other financial information), is to apply for federal work-study funds. For more information, contact Sally Gressens, who is the Asst. Dean for Graduate Studies in the School of Engineering; she's at gressens@stanford.edu.

Our RA/TA resources are very limited, and tend to be used to support our ongoing PhD students. Occasionally, RA funds become available over the summer (because a new project gets funded) --- if PhD students aren't available to do the work, then the professor may offer the RAship to an incoming MS student. However, this occurs only sporadically – in 4 of the 5 past years, zero MS students have been offered RAships.

In recent years, some students admitted to our program without funding have come to Stanford feeling certain that they will be able to
convince some faculty member to offer them a TAship or RAship. Despite admirable resourcefulness and great persistence, these unfunded students have not been successful at finding assistantship funding inside or outside of our department. These unhappy students have asked us to make this situation abundantly clear to potential students who do not receive funding. Their message to you is: **Do not accept admission to the EES program at Stanford without funding unless you are willing and able to borrow or afford the full costs of education.**

We realize that applicants from places like India and China will likely not be able to attend Stanford without financial assistance. The EES faculty have had an ongoing debate about whether we should offer admission to such applicants. Some feel that it is frustrating for the applicant to be offered admission without financial aid (and that the applicant will wonder why we have ignored their clearly stated need for funding), so they favor just telling such applicants that they were not accepted into the MS program. Our current practice in the EES program is to let these applicants know that we judged them as academically qualified for the program by admitting them, even if we aren't able to offer them funding.

*I was told I would be considered for financial aid. What are my chances?*

In recent years, the EES program has been able to offer funding to most, but not all of those applicants who were notified that they would be considered for financial aid. The percentage funded fluctuates depending on how much funding is made available to our program from the University, the School of Engineering, and our Department.

*I've got a financial aid offer from another school. How soon will Stanford let me know about financial aid?*

Stanford (as well as about 300 other US universities) belongs to the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS). All CGS members have signed a resolution saying that any prospective graduate students receiving offers of financial aid (scholarships, fellowships, traineeships or assistantships) have until April 15th to respond. You should have been sent a copy of the CGS resolution with your written financial aid offer from the other school.

You can examine the CGS website at http://www.cgsnet.org to see the text of the resolution, and to check whether this other university is
a member. Stanford mails out financial aid offers towards the end of March, which should give you adequate time to make a careful, informed decision about which school to attend before the April 15th deadline.